#### **Differences between Eastern and Western cultures**

#### Western philosophy is based on rational thought and hence the emphasis on logic, cause and effect. Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, is mainly derived from the religious teachings of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism. Confucianism promotes conservatism and therefore easterners are more conservative than western people. Though, at least in South Korea, I have noticed a remarkable generation gap between younger people, who have taken over many Western values, and middle-aged people, who are more conservative.

#### If in Western countries people are more individualistic and children are raised to be independent and make their choices themselves, then in Eastern countries modesty and obeying rules is valued. In Eastern countries mothers make choices for their children themselves and children believe that the choice their mother makes is the best for them. In Western countries like the USA, Canada and the UK mothers raise their children to be the best, and being smart and braging about personal qualities is a socially desirable responding.C:\Users\Juhan\Pictures\Yang Liu\concept of self.jpg

#### Concept of self

#### (The illustrations are by Yang Liu, who in my opinion has captured the difference between East (red background) and West (blue background) very well.)

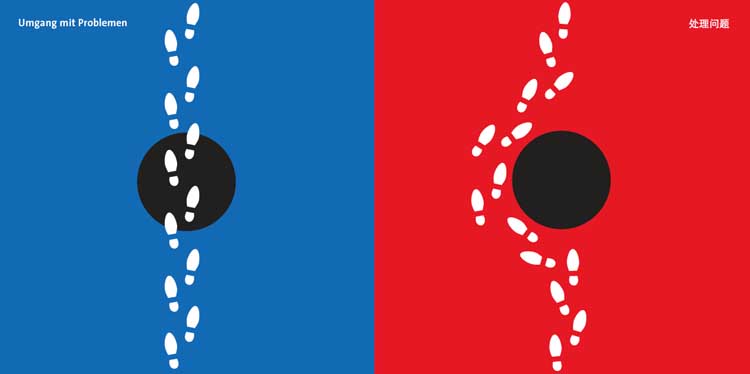
#### People in eastern countries are more collectivistic, which also mirrors in their eating habits. On my first day in Korea I was very surprised when I saw that Korean people eat soup and other dishes from the same bowl instead of everyone having their own dish. Collectivism also means that people take others’ feelings into an account when making choices; happiness is important but not more important than other things. It might even be difficult for eastern people to experience individual happiness. For more individualistic westerners happiness is the most important thing in life and people are not so willing to make sacrifices for others.

Westerners equate their identity with their rational mind rather than with the whole organism. This division between the mind and the body has led to a view of the universe as a mechanical system consisting of separate objects, which in turn were reduced to fundamental building blocks whose properties and interactions were thought to completely determine all natural phenomena. World is a collection of separate individuals and everything is put into categories to create order. Academic disciplines become fragmented and this has served as a rationale for treating the universe as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different groups.

The essence of the Eastern world view is the awareness of the unity and the mutual inter‑relation of all things and events, the experience of all phenomena in the world as manifestation of a basic oneness. Easterners don’t separate objects from their backgrounds like people in the West do. Therefore depending on the surrounding and the situation properties of the objects vary. World is a big field where everything is related and interconnected.

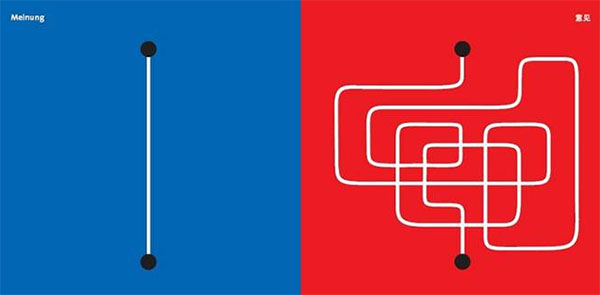
#### Western civilization based itself on the struggle between the Good and Evil, God and Satan or Psyche and Cupid. Eastern philosophical thought is based on this notion of the Yin and the Yang. The dark yin and the bright yang are arranged in a symmetrical manner. Life is the blended harmony of the yin and the yang.

The Eastern culture stresses on maintaining harmonious relationships within and outside the family so as to avoid the "loss of face". Westerners prefer emotional openness to emotional inhibition. One area worth mentioning is problems, arguments, disagreements, disputes, even crimes. In the West we have laws and judicial systems to take care of the more serious ones. We also have old adages and expressions like 'taking the bull by the horns', 'a problem faced is a problem solved', 'speaking your mind', 'not mincing your words', 'facing problems in the eye', 'not being afraid to speak out', 'telling it like it is', 'calling a spade a spade', anticipating problems and analyzing them afterwards for 'cause and effect'.



Addressing conflict

A good number of those concepts and ideas that might seem natural and logical to Westerners, or the 'right thing to do', can be almost the direct opposite of how Asian minds think or react when life is not running as smoothly as it might. In case of dispute, Asians usually go out of their way to avoid direct confrontation or argument, often resorting to what Westerners would call lying – 'white lies' or worse, hiding their feelings behind what appears to be a genuinely friendly smile, or just simply silence.



Telling the truth

#### Living in South Korea I have noticed that the hierarchy in society is much higher than in the West. For westerners who have been risen up to value themselves, it might prove to be difficult to accept.

#### C:\Users\Juhan\Pictures\Yang Liu\the boss.jpg

#### The boss

**Applying these differences in education**

When in the West the difference between the teacher’s and students’ positions is not as big as in Asian counties, students can speak their opinion out more and have discussions with the teacher. So when teaching in the western countries teachers can have more discussions in class as students are encouraged to have their own opinion and say it out.

#### In the East, however, there is more of a one‑way transmission of knowledge and this is more authoritative. Learners expect their teachers to be the store house of knowledge and they are reluctant to challenge the authority of the teacher. The teacher is still very much the dispenser, the judge and the jury. For the teacher to take a back‑seat is very discomforting to the learners.

#### The ethic of self‑ effacement is very powerful and is related to the various eastern philosophies of Islam, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. The prevalent value of modest behavior, of not drawing too much attention to oneself can affect the training methodology. Open discussion in front of a large group requires the student to infringe this ethic as he may be perceived as placing himself above. This position is illustrated by the Japanese saying, "The nail that sticks out must be hammered down." The Western assumption of active vocalization as a sign of maturity is not universal.

When asking the western students to write an essay or any other academic paper the teacher should whether give the students a variety of topics to choose from or let the students think the topic they want to write on themselves. This is because westerners are taught from the early age to be independent and make their choices themselves and that results in them being a bit reluctant when they cannot have a choice.

For students from the Eastern countries it might be a good idea to give one certain topic or a few to choose from to write on and not let the students think of the topic completely themselves, as the students trust the choices of people with a higher position. Also the results seem to be better this way.

#### On the other hand the opposite approach could be used to let the students develop the skills they do not possess. Therefore it might be useful to for example to give western learners a certain topic so they can develop the skills to write on any topic given to them and learn to come to terms with not having the possibility of choice, as in their future lives they will probably get into many situations where they have to do what is told.

In the West where people see things as being separated from each other and academic disciplines become fragmented. In Estonia it is often brought up as a problem in teaching – the students are taught different subjects but neither the teachers or students try to make connections between the knowledge of different subjects. I think in this we should try to apply the Eastern way of thinking in the Western educational system so Western students would learn to make connections and see the world more holistically.

In Western schools we have quite many exercises in different subjects where students have to categorize something. In Eastern schools teachers probably cannot use this kind of tasks as often, as easterners don’t see the world in categories but rather they see the relations between objects. So the exercises in the East should be built upon finding the relations between objects and not categorizing them.

#### The Eastern culture stresses on maintaining peaceful relationships to avoid the "loss of face". Westerners in the contrary prefer emotional openness. The Western style of conferencing where individual ideas are criticized would be too much a loss of face for some easterners. Yet it is this fear of failure (resulting in the loss of face for the person and his family) that motivates learning.